

Digital Storytelling: New Medium In Communicating Knowledge And Information

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ABSTRACT

Storytelling has been used traditionally around the world to educate informally from generation to generation. With the introduction and inclusion of technology and multimedia, storytelling crosses the boundary from being the informal medium to educate to one of the formal medium to educate people. The term coined for this type of storytelling is digital storytelling and it is gaining popularity nowadays among educators in educating students. This article is a concept article based on portions of literature review from a research that is still ongoing. The main purpose of the article is to inform and educate educators of the potentials of digital storytelling as the new medium in education domain and its power in leaving impact in delivering knowledge and information. It is highly hope that the article would enlighten people generally, and educators specifically of the power of digital storytelling in communicating knowledge and information.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, education, multimedia

INTRODUCTION

Story is an important element in human's life. According to Freeman (n.d.), story is an entertainment, learning and teaching tool in an effort to communicate, stir emotions and engaging people to read to the end and storytelling, according to Dudley (1997), storytelling is the art of storytellers to achieve the aforementioned purposes. People communicate everyday through stories. Stories are told, heard, and responded to in order to convey and absorb messages or ideas (Grisham, 2006). For generations, stories are utilized as a tool to pass down knowledge and wisdom from parents to children. It started long time ago informally as pictures on stone walls and has much evolved throughout history (Behmer, 2005). Most children remember bedtime stories by their parents or grandparents such as fairytales insinuated with moral values education for a very long time.

In this modern day, stories have gone through a major make over. From being an informal tool to educate, it has become a formal medium to educate students in learning institutes. Moreover, with the intervention of new technology and the appearance of multimedia with its rich media elements such as audio, video, animation, and graphic, stories have diversified from its traditional root without leaving its genuine purpose which is to educate knowledge and wisdom. Amalgamated with technology, storytelling has taken a new form with deeper impact in communicating ideas and knowledge sharing. The popular term coined for it is digital storytelling. This article starts with the definition and a little bit of history of digital storytelling. It progresses to the explanation of digital storytelling in education and its contributions in a classroom. Lastly, the article discusses a few of application of digital storytelling in education area.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Technology is a fast pace evolution and it affects many aspect of life and different domains. One of the domains affected by technology generally, or multimedia specifically is storytelling. Long before the birth of technology, traditional storytelling is expressed in its most basic forms, which is orally, or written. However, the introduction of multimedia has changed the perspective of storytelling in a new way. Digital storytelling is one of the fruits of technology. According to Porter (2004), digital storytelling combines the art of traditional storytelling with multimedia elements such as images, graphics, music, and audio in order to craft a personally voiced narrative. As for Robin (2008a), he states that digital storytelling is a combination of art of storytelling with different digital media such as audio, video, and graphic. Whatever the definitions of digital storytelling, it is undeniable that this new form of storytelling is taking part in the world of digital communication in many areas and it is here to stay.

The transition of digital storytelling from traditional to digital form was started by the late Dana Atchley. He was a media producer and an artist in multi disciplines, and through his multimedia autobiography called *Next Exit*, he collaborated with Joe Lambert in utilizing multimedia technologies to turn traditional story to digital. In 1994, Nina Mullen joined both of them and together they founded the San Francisco Digital Media Center which later on became Center for Digital Storytelling (Lambert, n.d.). The main purpose of the center is to foster the people with zero background in storytelling or media production to tell personal stories in digital form. The digital stories created would become their personal life mementos and it can be shared with other people. Based on his observation in his digital story workshop, Lambert created seven elements to be considered in constructing digital story. The elements are point of view, dramatic questions, emotional content, the gift of your voice, the power of soundtrack, economy, and finally pacing (Lambert, 2006). Center of Digital Storytelling has become references to so many talented and potential storytellers. Among all, Bernard Robin from University of Houston adapted Lambert's seven elements into his own ten elements and according to him, Center for Digital Storytelling is frequently used as a starting point to work with digital stories (Robin, 2008b). As time flies, people started noticing the significance of digital storytelling and started to apply it in wider context outside personal stories. One of the areas affected by it is education.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN EDUCATION

Education helps to transmit and impart knowledge on minds of people in this world. Only through education that people can empower and elevate themselves to higher and better places in the ranking of society. Education has evolved a lot since the beginning of its recognition. Walking into the 21st century, education was forced to evolve once again in accordance with the 21st Century Skills. Being in the digital era, education is necessitated to adapt massively to the requirements of the new era in effort to be parallel with the new learning expectations. According to Jake (2006), there are four categories of 21st Century Skills which is digital age literacies, inventive thinking, effective communication, and high productivity and he also stated that the process of learning through digital storytelling attended to the expectations of the skills categories aforementioned. Digital storytelling plays important role and has special place in the world of modern education since it becomes the convergence point of learning process. According to Barrett (2006), digital storytelling assists the student-centered learning process by being the convergence point of its four strategies as shown in Figure 1.

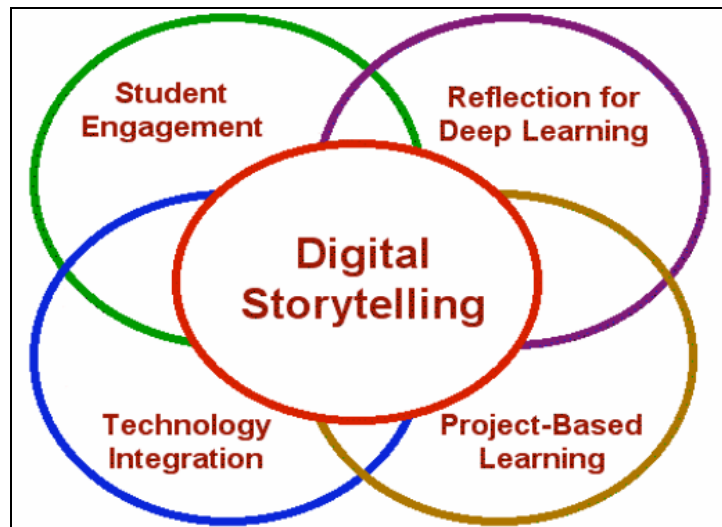


Figure 1: Convergence of Student-Centered Learning Strategies (Barrett, 2006)

In a wider sense, Robin (2008a) wrote that educators are seeing the changes in today's classrooms. With the technologies getting cheaper, the rate of growth and integration of digital storytelling for education purpose is increasing and it has become the convergence points of modern classroom activities as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Convergence of Digital Storytelling in Education (Robin, 2008a)

As stated, digital storytelling is not just a miniscule, add on component in education. Though relatively an infant to the education world, it has climbed the ladder of significance from being one of the tools of learning to the convergence point of education. With the requirements of 21st Century Skills, the benefits and usage of digital storytelling in the classroom is not to be looked with one eye closed any longer.

Benefits of Digital Storytelling in a Classroom

There are several benefits of absorbing digital storytelling as one of the elements in classroom learning process and it has been suggested and acknowledged by few prominent people who have been using digital storytelling for education purpose. Based on the study conducted by Jenkins and Lonsdale (2007) on higher institution students community, digital storytelling is capable to inspire deep and reflective learning. By constructing digital stories, it acts as a platform for students to connect with others thought process by giving and receiving critiques. The critiques received and given would stimulate the possibility of occurrences of reflective learning among peers. Through the critiques on the stories, students understanding is no longer implicit and they can reflect selves and others understanding better. Moreover, the knowledge impart in the form of digital story is not tacit as it is clearly stated and can be watched repeatedly. Any critiques received on the weaknesses can always be improved and the next digital story would be constructed differently.

As for Robin (2008b), he sees the benefits of the inclusion of digital storytelling in classroom from both perspectives, the educator and the students. Digital storytelling, as stated by him, can be an effective instructional tool by educators and an effective learning tool for students. Teachers can use a multimedia-rich digital story at the beginning of class to serve as an anticipatory set in order to apprehend the students' attention and interest in the class. Riley (1995) states that the inclusion of multimedia elements would make the learning process interesting, fun and the retention duration is much longer. It can also be the catalyst to encourage the students to be opened to new ideas that are about to be imparted on them. Other than that, teachers can use a digital story to amplify lessons in class with a large number of students. The digital story shown would be able to reach to students better and it can assist in visualizing the abstract ideas or contents of lessons making students easier to understand and as stated by Iskander, Catten, Jones, Jameson, & Balcells (1995), multimedia helps in modernize and improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

From the perspective of students, digital storytelling can be a powerful tool to teach students to be creative and analytical. By giving assignments that relate to digital storytelling, students must conduct research in order to gain information regarding the topic given. This type of activity would motivate digital-age students in a classroom more compared to studying the traditional way. Constructing digital story could enhance students' communication skills because the process of making a good digital story requires them to search for ideas, ask the right questions, convey thoughts, organize the ideas in a meaningful ways, and finally construct the ideas into digital stories. Once the digital stories are completed, students can always publish it to the World Wide Web to share their piece of work with people all around the world. This can nurture the feeling of accomplishment, collaboration, and as well as giving the opportunity for them to criticize and being critique by others (Jenkins & Lonsdale, 2007; Robin, 2008b).

The combination of traditional storytelling with modern pop culture and technology is what interest educators in digital storytelling says Lowenthal (2009). Lowenthal enlisted a couple of benefits of digital storytelling in education which some of them are redundant with Robin's, Jenkin's and Lonsdale's. Firstly, he states that by including multimedia in storytelling, teachers can escalate students' engagement in class. Students in twenty first century generation are exposed to technology and digital media. Therefore, it is a good way to engage students in learning process using digital storytelling. Secondly, with the available online technology, students' digital stories will not only reach in the local classroom but also to the global audience. This is one of the strengths of digital storytelling. It is digital and it can be uploaded to any free online video sharing and viewing repositories such as YouTube. That way the digital stories constructed in class can be broadcasted to the world. The knowledge gained and presented in class is now shared with the entire world. This amplifies the effect of knowledge learned in class.

There are different types of students in a classroom that requires different academic approach (Ohler, 2008). Not all students are receptive to the old school way of teaching. Some of them are impervious to the traditional method. However, digital storytelling gives voice to all types of students regardless their academic approach requirement. All they need is creativity and a minimal technological capability. Via digital storytelling, all students can speak out their mind and opinion regarding a particular matter, which is impossible without the intervention of technology and storytelling. By allowing the students to express their thoughts and opinions through digital medium, not only can it give voice to all types of students, it also helps to support the requirement of this century definition of literacy. According to Thoman (2005), literacy in this century is no longer about reading words on article and expressing its meaning to others. With the birth of multimedia, the meaning of literacy has been redefined and it is insufficient for students to know how to read and write. Digital storytelling is formed from combination of multimedia elements hence it fulfills one of the requirements of 21st Century literacy which is using powerful multimedia technology tools for expression (Thoman, 2005).

The last benefit of digital storytelling in education is student emotions. According to Lowenthal (2009), emotion is the core of teaching and learning. As aforementioned, digital storytelling gives voice to all students. By doing so, students are free to express their deep emotions in the way that they see fits via digital storytelling to peers and teachers. Some students that experienced in the development of digital storytelling in class said that it became a means for them to express the sadness in their lives and by sharing with others via digital stories bring closer to the emotional issues such as losing parents or other tragic incidents in their lives (Robin & Pierson, 2005).

There are many ways for students to construct digital stories and as explained above, experts have proven that digital stories are applicable in classrooms. The next section will discuss two examples of digital storytelling application in classrooms.

Examples of Digital Storytelling Application in a Classroom

Digital storytelling is blooming as one of the tools to associate classrooms to students and entire world. With its digital advantages, knowledge travels faster than it did before. Several cases have shown the application of digital storytelling in classrooms. Two examples have been selected for this article to demonstrate the application of digital storytelling in classrooms.

Sakka and Zualkernan (2005) from American University of Sharjah, U.A.E have applied digital storytelling in a higher education scenario to enhance learning process. A case study in a civil engineering laboratory has been conducted for proving that digital storytelling does assist students achieve learning outcomes better. There are many types of digital storytelling but the researchers had selected passive form of digital storytelling, which is a non-interactive form. Participants of 39 students were divided into seven groups and each of them was assigned to construct a digital story video telling about the engineering experiment they conducted in lab. The digital story was to educate other students publicly regarding the experiment. Seven digital stories were produced and a survey was conducted to gain subjective assessment whether digital storytelling helps to enhance their understanding regarding the subject matter. The results of the survey presents that the digital story enhances their comprehension of the specific topic in the lab experiment and the ability to handle the lab equipments. In addition, they stated that the digital story helps preparing them in practical examination, elevate their communication skills, and makes the educational process more compelling. However, the results only reflect the subjective assessment of the participant, which participated in the lab experiment and not their real performance in examination.

Another example is by Verdugo and Belmonte (2007) that use digital storytelling to improve English learning process among young Spanish learners. The study was conducted among six-year-old Spanish students to prove that digital stories help improve listening comprehension in English as Foreign Language (EFL). In total, 220 students participated in the study and they were divided into two groups that is control and experimental group. Digital stories were introduced in the experimental group as a tool to help improve their English listening comprehension. The study collaborated with Kindersite Project which is an Internet site hosted in UK that provides online materials for English classroom learning. Sixty-nine graded digital stories from Kindersite were selected and given to the teachers to be used by the students participating. Using the digital stories, the students took an active part in the learning process as the stories came with tasks that need to be completed and each student learned within their own pace. The data collected from the study was positive. The outcome of the study shows that the experimental group had improved their English learning comprehension skills more than the control group. Verdugo and Belmonte (2007) argues that the reasons the outcome of the study was positive because digital stories fostered the students' concentration of the narrative received. Not to forget the replay value of the digital stories also helps in prolonging the impact of the listening process. The teachers provided positive feedback too by stating that the inclusion of digital stories in the listening process nurtures the practice of collaboration of the students in accomplishing the task given.

Those are two examples of the application of digital stories in classroom learning process. There are so many more studies conducted to prove that digital storytelling has its place in the classroom and the result of those studies shown that digital storytelling does help improve learning process.

CONCLUSION

There are many more benefits that digital storytelling can serve to education that it exceeds the boundary of this article. Nevertheless, with the selected few benefits explained in the article, it is hoped that it inspires educators to implement digital storytelling in classroom for the power of digital stories not only lies in communicating knowledge and information but it extends to the level of affecting the students' literacy survival in this ever expanding digital age. As Keller put it (as cited in Porter, 2008), "Tell your tales; make them true. If they endure, so will you."

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